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WOMEN'S EQUALITY AND NATIONAL LIBERATION

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One of the major challenges for those people concerned with women's equality is the development of a unifying theoretical focus that connects local concerns with national and international issues. Since so much of the social analysis in our society is based on the local, individualistic approach, it is necessary to attempt to devise "ways of seeing" and knowing that incorporate the previously excluded—or to put it another way, that turn "mankind" into "humankind." For those also interested in national liberation in today's world, this means going beyond the problem of Eurocentricity in contemporary social theory. In order to do this, "it is imperative that the absent . . . be made present because the greater part of the truth, as is shown by the continuing revolutions in the Third World, is in that which is absent" (Mafeje 1981). This essay, then, intends to examine two issues—national liberation and women's equality—from the perspective of that which has been previously excluded. Inherent in such a paradigm is the imperative of integrating a sensitivity to global issues with an awareness that women around the world may have different priorities. Such a sensitivity is cognizant of the fact that the discourse of the U.S. women's movement, as well as the national and international representation of it, is controlled by elites.

Nonetheless, it is reasonable to assert that the women's movement in the United States has made two significant contributions. First, it has

highlighted the relationship between reproductive rights and an equitable health-care-delivery system (e.g., Dreifus 1978; Frankfort 1972). Second, the women's movement has also challenged the idealized roles and concepts about family structure that have been held up as models by which to measure and oppress those women who are structurally denied access to that idealization (Davis 1981; Andreas 1971).

Yet, the major portion of the mainstream women's movement in the United States—and, by extension, the Western women's movement in general—has been hampered by characteristics that limit its international relevance. First, it has been essentially a struggle for *equal access*.¹ In this way, the women's movement replicates the problems of the U.S. civil rights movement. Neither movement has as its basis the transformation of the system at its roots; the major concern has been to open up the system so that "women could also be policemen," or, "blacks could be promoted in the army." To challenge the system itself would be to confront *what* the police or the army actually does. Another problem of both the civil rights struggle and the women's movement is that the elites in those movements have become the officially recognized leadership, channels through which the lesser-privileged are expected to voice their grievances. This not only leads to tokenism as a solution but also to a clear reduction in economic concerns.

In the place of economic issues, cultural or gender identity has become the major focus. In the case of African American men and women, cultural nationalism has become one of the central themes of the civil rights battle, sometimes based on a longing to find African kings and queens in the African past. More often it has been related to reconstructing long-lost links to Africa—a noble goal. Thus, the problems of African people are defined as primarily cultural, and rarely are they tied to political economy. As Stanislas Adotevi (1972) warned, the black poet who did not participate in his or her people's total struggle merely exercised in "negritation" and ultimately proved to be a member of a comfortable elite connecting to the people's movement exclusively through song. Furthermore, a critical component of this dynamic is posing "all white people"—irrespective of economic or social condition—as the enemy.

The women's movement in the United States has a similar paradigm. For many, gender and sexual identity has become the major focus of women's concerns, rather than economics. The reification of gender propels the movement into identifying women and men as two distinct classes (Atkinson 1974). All men therefore are transformed into oppressors of all women, and hence the former are declared the enemy; this tendency is evident in a lecture once given at the College at Old Westbury, whose title may be paraphrased as "There is no such thing as a rich woman." This conveniently permitted the elite women spokespersons to

avoid the question of their participation in the economic oppression of many of their sisters in the nation and throughout the world. Such an inquiry of necessity would have linked women's oppression worldwide with the role the U.S. government plays in the international economic order. Instead, the standard position of some Western feminists was that all women were natural allies. An extreme version of this line of thought is that Margaret Thatcher, prime minister of Great Britain, and Jeanne Kirkpatrick, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and architect of militaristic U.S. policies in Central America, are more deserving of solidarity—because they are women—than the men who fought against those policies.

Female chauvinism is an outgrowth of a primarily gender-oriented struggle because it operates on the assumptions that women are more "human" than men, and that this is biologically determined (Johnston 1973). The projection of sexualism, which focuses on sex and sexuality separate from economics and politics, not only has made it difficult for many national minority women in the United States to identify with the more privileged sectors of the women's movement, but such a perspective is also in the interests of the ruling class. For one thing, it prevents the women's movement in the United States from becoming a powerful force for positive and creative change, because a unified approach to women's issues is avoided. A unified approach must simultaneously integrate the questions of racism, class oppression, and sexism.

Sexualism, by concentrating on sexual identity, has also permitted the Far Right to appropriate concerns about the family. Instead of analyzing the impact of unemployment, lack of child care, and militarism on women and their families, the movement made the right to participate in and define one's sexuality take primacy in the women's struggle for equality.

Hence, the divisions in the women's movement, as reflected in the "Common Differences" conference, are between those who believe that the major struggle for women is increasing their access to, and control over, the world's resources and those who believe that the main issue is access to, and control over, orgasms. Although sexuality is important, it *must* be tied to the political and the economic; otherwise, women set themselves up for another kind of domination. It is my position that the global class question must be central in the struggle for the world's resources, goods, and services, and that women's equality should be defined within this overall struggle.

It is important to note that both heterosexual and lesbian women fall prey to sexualism. This phenomenon emerges as a natural factor in a society that has traditionally been sex-obsessed. On the one hand, sex is utilized as a marketing concept to sell all types of commodities from automobiles to toothpaste. On the other hand, the notion that sex is a

normal physiological process about which children should be informed at all levels has never really taken hold in all sectors of U.S. society, given the Calvinistic ethic that is at the root of the country's values. It is not totally illogical that some women should have reached a conclusion that their struggle should net as a result the right to the sexual behavior to which men feel they are entitled. This is bourgeois ideology for many reasons, however.

First of all, it concentrates on the *individual* and is narcissistic. Such a definition of women's true dimensions for struggle pulls away from the *collective* or shared concerns—except with one's own class. Sexualism becomes the new elitism, the new expression of class struggle within the movement, since most of the world's working women—including many poor women in the United States—identify survival issues to be food, housing, health care, and employment, not sexuality.

The 1980 Women's Mid-Decade Meeting in Copenhagen offers a particularly germane illustration of this point. One of the most tendentious and divisive points raised by Western women during that conference concerned clitoridectomy and the practice of infibulation of female genitalia, which still exist in parts of Africa and the Middle East. This became a rallying point for Western women, and as they promoted this issue, it seemed to establish a hierarchical relationship to their Third World sisters through intellectual neocolonialism. It revealed latent racism, because the form in which the issues were articulated was in terms of those "savage customs" from "backward" African and Arab cultures. Underlying this formulation was the implicit evidence of a rising anti-Arab and anti-Islamic fervor that was starting to emanate from Western countries. As Edda Gachukia (one of the Kenyan organizers of the 1985 End of the Decade Meeting in Nairobi) told those attending a pre-Nairobi session at the World Division Office of the United Methodist church, this action in Copenhagen forced Arab and African women—who had always fought against female circumcision on health grounds—to feel compelled to defend it. In addition, the women attending this meeting saw a consolidation of the schism between the issues set forth by Third World women and those of interest to Western women.

Nawal el Saadawi, an Egyptian writer who described her own clitoridectomy as part of her book on sexuality in the Arab world (1980), has mentioned elsewhere (1982; 1983) that Western women often go to countries such as the Sudan and "see" only clitoridectomy, but never notice the role of multinational corporations and their exploited labor. And Rose Catchings, whose office sponsored the May 1985 meeting with Gachukia, pointed out that it was the way in which this theme emerged at the 1980 meeting in Copenhagen that forced minority women from the United

States to question their relationship to this type of advocacy for Third World women's rights.

A careful examination of this issue demonstrates how sexualism can serve as a paradigm or "lens" for Western feminists to measure women in other parts of the world. In an interview done at the "Common Differences" conference with Patterson and Gilliam, el Saadawi (1983) pointed to the work of Fran Hosken as a case in point, "[She] came to my home in Cairo . . . I gave her information regarding the political and historical aspects, and she didn't use it." And Patterson (1983) observed that at the 1982 African Studies Association meeting, many objected to "[Hosken's] using clitoridectomy as the only point for defining women's oppression in Africa and the Middle East." A careful perusal of the quarterly of which Hosken is editor—*Women's International Network News* (WINN)—and its regular column entitled "Female Circumcision: Genital and Sexual Mutilation" demonstrates an unusually single-minded preoccupation with this issue, and confirms el Saadawi's assertion that Hosken is ahistorical. In affirming that WINN is the only journal to address this question, Hosken—now recognized in the West as an expert on the question of clitoridectomy—exotifies Egypt and the subject in general. This lack of a horizontal, nonvertical approach produces a hierarchical discussion in which the "expert" looks at an aspect of another culture from "up above."

An egalitarian focus, on the other hand, which embodies a methodological principle of "parallel process," makes clear that many "traditional practices" in U.S. culture—child sexual abuse immediately comes to mind—also threaten the lives and limbs of children. Yet WINN "pursues" the Third World in a quasi-titillating way, eschewing a more global approach.

What became clearer after 1980 was that the issue of sexuality should be neither divorced from the political and the economic, nor take primacy over the question of reproductive rights. As Sally Mugabe (wife of Zimbabwe's prime minister, Robert Mugabe) said in her press conference at the Nairobi Meeting in July 1985, there are two issues of power that are central to women, and without which women's equality is impossible: (1) independent access to money or resources that enable women to contribute to their own and their children's livelihood, and (2) control over the reproductive decisions that relate to their bodies.

And increasingly, U.S. women are losing not only the principle of affirmative action in the workplace, but also the rights to manage their bodies with regard to reproduction. Moreover, the trend toward arbitrary male custody in litigation affects all women in the U.S., and is fundamentally an economic question. As lesbian anthropologist Renee Llanusa-Cestero elucidates, "it is this trend towards the reinvestment of male

dominance around which lesbian and heterosexual women can be united as a group—but *not* as a class.”² The very concept of “class” itself is more exact as a component of the Marxian paradigm. However, the precision of a definition of class that is rooted in the Marxian theory of socioeconomic formations has rarely been given importance other than in intellectual circles. Ethel Tobach, series editor of *Genes and Gender*, explains that the reason for this lies in the relationship of the women’s movement to the larger society of which it is a part: “It is not that women do not find dialectical materialism a useful method for analysis, but that they have incorporated the same anti-Marxist stance that is projected in the U.S. society as a whole.”³

Moreover, the voices of U.S. women appear to have become muted, in part by the mythology that women in the United States have realized more freedom than women in other countries—especially those of the Third World. Women in the U.S. all too infrequently challenge the definitions of “freedom” that are bandied about. What a multinational corporation defines as a “most favorable investment climate—cheap labor, abundant resources, new markets, and the *political climate to guarantee the first three*” (*Controlling Interest* 1978)—is often the bottom line in the definition of “freedom” that U.S. soldiers are sent to defend. That cheap and exploited labor includes women. Whether in urban or rural areas, women are frequently the ones most likely to be employed in tasks involving minute detail, long hours, and repetitive work that is undervalued, lesser-paid, and temporary (Bisilliat and Fieloux 1983). Multinational companies oppose national liberation movements because they challenge a status quo that is in the interest of big business.

There are compelling interlocking relationships connecting natural resources, national liberation struggles, multinational corporations, and women’s oppression worldwide. For example, the struggle for power in Namibia and South Africa certainly involves critical control over mineral resources. Few U.S. citizens realize how many of the minerals found in abundance in southern Africa—including cadmium, chromium, vanadium, cobalt, and uranium—are used in the production of turbine jet engines, nuclear reactors, and other military components (Nabudere 1977). For many in the U.S., the liberation of the black majority in southern Africa is secondary to the question of whether we can “keep the minerals flowing to us” without paying more. The profit motive is key to U.S. definitions of freedom. Yet, until recently the U.S. government told its citizens that the struggle is against “an evil empire” presumably doing the Devil’s work (Lewis 1983). Although Namibia’s pending independence is being touted in the U.S. media, the effect of the Reagan administration’s policy of “constructive engagement” with the South African government has been the creeping apartheidization of U.S. culture and the gradual labeling

of those of the world’s peoples who dare to challenge the transnationals’ definition of “freedom” and “liberty” as “communists” and “terrorists.”

The main influence of apartheid on U.S. society is the acceptance and legitimization of the Pretoria regime’s view that anyone who would transform South Africa as it is now is a “terrorist.” Apartheid’s jails are filled with women serving long sentences and who actively worked against that system, such as Teresa Ramashamola of the United Democratic Front or Marion Sparg of the African National Congress (ANC). ANC freedom fighters are routinely executed for high treason in a country where they cannot vote, own land, or have political rights.

Apartheid also affects family structure; for instance, childrearing practices must accommodate the system of labor control. According to Ona Jirira (1982), Zimbabwean scholar in economics, the relationship between women’s reproductive rights and economic factors under apartheid bears scrutiny. Women under apartheid bear the brunt of having to feed the family as a consequence of the forced separation of men from their families. In other parts of southern Africa, women in the past were often forced into a seasonal labor migration process. Whereas formerly they were, say, subsistence weavers, as land was taken away by multinational corporations, women were forced to pick a crop which would interrupt the lactation process. Family life thus became distorted by the needs of production, especially when production was controlled by those unconcerned with the interests of laborers.

Apartheid is the most pernicious form of social and productive order in existence. Such a system clearly demonstrates the need to merge the issues of political, economic, and racial oppression (UN Centre against Apartheid 1978). In this context, what southern African woman could identify with a women’s struggle that did not address the issue of the oppression of men workers as well? Yet this is precisely what some women in the U.S. do, maintaining that the problem of men workers is not a “woman’s issue.”

Yet another example of a national liberation question that resembles apartheid, and which confronts women in a particularly difficult way, is the situation existing in the West Bank and Gaza—a reality that I witnessed myself. On February 20, 1988, eleven women from the United States embarked on a fact-finding trip to the West Bank and Gaza. We were the first all-woman delegation from the U.S. to visit the region after the Intifadah began in December 1987. The delegation was sponsored by the Union of Palestinian Women in the U.S., and was a pluralistic group including educators, writers, Catholic nuns, and Jews. (I was the only African American participant.) Our group witnessed beatings by the Israeli army; we visited men, women, and children in hospitals who had had

their limbs amputated or broken, or had been shot; and we also met some of the families of those killed since December.

For example, on February 25, 1989, in a widely reported incident, the Israeli army invaded the Al Ittihad Hospital in Nablus, where they beat thirty doctors and nurses, dragged six patients from their beds, and beat them and their families. This occurred within ninety minutes of a visit by our delegation to the hospital, and it forever transformed the way we viewed the trip. The very day of our visit to Al Ittihad Hospital, before the invasion, we talked to patients, and saw the x-rays of multiple wounds to limbs fractured with dum dum bullets (banned presumably according to the Geneva Accords). Women and men both struggled to overcome traditional Muslim modesty about the body in order to tell our women's delegation that they were being wounded in their reproductive organs. The night before the hospital was attacked, we interviewed a doctor whose area of expertise was the intrauterine deaths caused by a poison "tear" gas (produced in the U.S. at Federal Laboratories in Saltzburg, Pennsylvania).⁴ He confirmed that there was a high incidence of attacks to the genitalia of Palestinian men. From the depths of my African American heritage and collective memory of lynchings, the attacks on the reproductive organs of Palestinian men and women seemed part of a deliberate policy. Reports of such attacks also gave new meaning to the 7 A.M. February 24, 1988, "Voice of Israel" news program recommending that Israeli Jewish couples increase their families from 2.8 to 3.5 children.

As I visited that region, what struck me was the consolidation of policies that were similar to what I had learned about apartheid. Just as in South Africa, funerals are banned in the Occupied Territories. Our delegation was turned away from one village on Monday, February 22, as we tried to attend a service. We did visit a family whose teen-age daughter had been killed in her kitchen by the bullet of a settler; the body was returned to the family at midnight for immediate burial only, and no women were allowed to attend the funeral. Nothing can convey what it was like to hold the hand of, and try to provide comfort and solidarity to, a mother whose child had been buried the week before.

Also as in South Africa, even religious services are controlled and subject to army invasion. The February 22, 1988, issue of the *Jerusalem Post* cites the Right Wing Tehiya party's call to the Israeli Defense Force to "cleanse the mosques of those who incite to rebellion." Palestinians must carry ID cards at all times under threat of imprisonment. No one from the West Bank or Gaza could be in Jerusalem after midnight. The U.S. women's delegation was made to feel the curfew that applies to Palestinians. We had to stop all gatherings with Palestinians at a certain time in the evening so the people we were talking with could return to their towns in time for the curfew.

In spite of the increased restrictions, Palestinian women are more and more in the forefront of the resistance, and they are increasingly among the dead and wounded. Women have organized into neighborhood groups throughout the West Bank and Gaza. These committees are an integral part of the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees in the Occupied Land. This new militance of women is matched by the commitment of the Palestinian communities as a whole throughout the West Bank and Gaza.

On the night before the return to the United States, our delegation met with Palestinian women leaders from all over the region. Not only these women but everyone the delegation talked to about the situation insisted that *their* representative in the international community and to the world is the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Just as in South Africa, where even the colors of the African National Congress are strictly forbidden, so too *any* symbol connected to Palestinian nationhood and sovereignty—or to the PLO—is inimical to the Israeli government. And just as important, the U.S. delegation also brought back testimony from those anonymous Israeli army soldiers and doctors who believed that their orders to break bones and strategically inflict wounds represented a threat to their humanity.

Such conditions are not unique to the Middle East or southern Africa. The question of the relationship between mineral resources and independence is also a central one to the people of the South Pacific French colony of New Caledonia, which is one of the world's largest suppliers of nickel. Many U.S. citizens do not even know where this country is located. Yet, what goes on in this French colony encapsulates the issues of national liberation elsewhere. Strategic migration as a metropolitan weapon against an indigenous independence movement has been largely successful. The original inhabitants—Melanesians, or Kanaks according to their own self-definition—number 45,000; the European French, 30,000; French from Algeria, 5,000; Polynesians, 7,000; and Vietnamese refugees, 7,000.⁵ Each of these groups receives rewards from French colonialism that the Kanaks do not. Therefore, the absolute numbers of people who want independence from France have been reduced. According to Dewe Gorodey, the first Kanak woman to receive a college education, the French government maintains that the nickel supply will run out in only twenty years. Presumably, independence will be easier to attain only as the nickel supply is increasingly depleted. The crisis in New Caledonia is linked to the struggle for a nuclear-free and independent Pacific, and the desire for the French to cease the ecologically destructive nuclear explosions in the Pacific. In addition, existence in New Caledonia is marked with reservations cum bantustans for the Kanak people. Even the open-air food market is virtually dominated by women of French descent whose families

originally came from Algeria after the Algerian Revolution. Is this not a "woman's issue"?

The kind of activism that U.S. women promoted against the Nestle multinational corporation's advertisements for infant formula in the Third World could be initiated around the issue of mineral-resource plunder. At the very least, analyses of the relationship between liberation movements and labor exploitation in areas of strategic minerals should become themes that women examine, if only because women and their children are casualties. But U.S. women often frustrate attempts to give discussions a more global perspective.

An example of this very process is the experience of Domitila Barrios de Chungara at the International Women's Year Tribunal in Mexico in 1975. Here was a woman who, as an organizer of tin miners' wives against Bolivian state repression, had been jailed for being part of the struggle against exploitation of workers in her country. In *Let Me Speak* (Barrios de Chungara 1978), she maintains that U.S. women's-rights activist Betty Friedan accused her of being "manipulated by men" and thinking only "about politics" because she was concerned about underfed children, vomiting lungs, and underdevelopment. Domitila insisted that the "interests of the bourgeoisie really aren't our interests." In Bolivia, even issues such as population and birth control are not automatically guaranteed to be subjects of uniform agreement among women, and therefore have class-bound elements. On the one hand, women should have reproductive choice, but in racist, repressive governments with birth control as policy, what seems to be "choice" can be an instrument against women.

For example, though Bolivia is underpopulated, many Bolivian women have been forcibly sterilized.⁶ Yet, the former Banzer regime was later to agree to a secret plan to resettle thirty thousand white families fleeing southern African liberation on the grounds that it would help ameliorate the "racial imbalance" in Bolivia, which was an Indian majority.⁷ Birth control in this context is not automatically something one struggles to gain.

Another example of repressive state birth control involves Puerto Rican women—in a situation of colonial domination by the United States—who not only have been sterilized in large numbers, but also were the "guinea pigs" for contraceptive experimentation. How many U.S. women are concerned about this type of colonialist excess? Or, is there a general acceptance of the view that the Puerto Ricans who raise these questions are merely nationalists, and therefore terrorists?

To interpret every struggle for national equality in the Third World as a result of "Soviet clientism" is the ultimate in racist ideology. It assumes that oppressed peoples would be content to continue being the world's chattel were it not for "outside agitation." The latter phrase was

frequently heard during the civil rights struggles of the sixties in the U.S. South, and in itself the concept demonstrates the merging of the dynamics of racism and economic oppression with sexual domination. These dynamics also coalesce in every major former plantation economy in the Western hemisphere, with the notable exception of Cuba.

At this point, it is useful to note that Cuba is the one former plantation economy that has seriously attempted to address—at the national level—the issues of racism and sexism. Not only are Cubans confronting the difficult task of redefining national identity, but this is done at all levels of society. Cuban leader Fidel Castro has proclaimed that Cuba is an Afro-Latin country, and he has affirmed the importance of integrating more blacks, women, and youth into its party leadership. Films such as *The Other Francisco* and *The Last Supper* also reflect the Cuban revolution's interest in the historical reinterpretation of the plantation past.⁸ Moreover, writers such as Morejón (1981) demonstrate the need to reconstruct theory regarding the national formation of Cuban culture to include all of the country's people. The substantial gains that the Cuban people have made in free health care and free education have had an extraordinary impact on women, as well. As an African American woman, I was struck most as I traveled in Cuba by the fact that it was the only former slave society in the Western hemisphere where people cannot be found burrowing in garbage cans for food.

The Brazilian case is also instructive because there are certain similarities with the United States. Afro-Brazilian women share many of the same problems that African American women in the U.S. have with the mainstream women's movement. For one thing, the spokespersons in the women's movement in Brazil suffer from the same strategic tunnel vision about the intersection of race, gender, and class as occurs in the U.S. As González (1982) points out, "the black woman is practically excluded from the texts and discussion of the feminist movement in our country [Brazil]."

One example of this academic myopia can be found in the study of Bahian women in the labor force by Elizabeth Jelin (1977). A historical analysis demonstrates that fully 80 percent or more of the population of Bahia, which was once the seat of the plantation economy, appear to be West African, whether they acknowledge being "black" or not. Thus, the issue of racism is central to this discussion, as it is in any former plantation economy. Although Jelin clearly attempts to use a Marxist methodology, it seems that she has chosen to highlight the question of political economy and ignore that of race altogether. This becomes a classic problem of some Marxists, repeated over and over again, as though the issues of race and class did not need to be addressed concretely and simultaneously, especially as they intersect the issue of gender (which includes sexuality).

Often overlooked in such Marxist and/or feminist analyses is the fact that women of African or indigenous descent in the Western hemisphere have been forced to seek "whitening"—either of their phenotypes (physical appearance) or their cultural expression—as a process to gain social acceptance and/or employability (Gilliam 1988). In many of the countries with either indigenous or black majorities, the working woman experiences a particular oppression on the basis of gender. Not only has she been the unsung transformer and transmitter of national culture, but she has often not had the most elementary reproductive rights, in that she has not always been able to control access to her body. The race mixture and subsequent cultural synthesis that are described positively by many ruling-class intellectuals were primarily due to the effects of exploitative patterns of conjugal union (Martínez-Alier 1974). That is, the woman was from the dominated sector and belonged to a different ethnic group from that of the male, who more often than not was from the dominant class and had power over her. Race mixture and cultural contact have represented the concrete exploitation of women from less-privileged sectors. Although Martínez-Alier was writing about Cuba, the implication of her work is that there was a critical difference between white and black women as regards "honor." The black woman had to earn honor through her comportment; the white woman would lose honor (which was *a priori* ascribed) by her behavior. In historical reconstruction, then, there is the need to visualize the burden of slavery from the perspective of the slave woman. After all, responsibility is on the side of privilege. And, as Stetson (1982) has pointed out, many scholars treat slavery as a black male phenomenon.

In addition, male dominance in the social sciences can produce theoretical entrapments such as that which I call "the-Great-Sperm-Theory-of-National-Formation." Gilberto Freyre, one of the best-known Brazilian sociologists of the plantation economy, suffers from this "optic." To Freyre, the Portuguese *man* created a "Portuguese society in the tropics" through his creation of the mulata, or mixed-race woman. This ideology, called "Luso-tropicalism," has been challenged by Marxist intellectuals. But Brazilian feminists—whether Marxist or bourgeois in approach—have yet to challenge this racist sexism in Brazil.⁹ This defective analysis is directly related to the fiction that "Iberian" slavery was more benign than Anglo-Saxon—a myth that has adherents in both the U.S. and South America. Freyre (1961, 261) himself elucidates this position amply for the reader:

The growing importance of the civilization *nee* Portuguese and nowadays, according to some of us, Luso-tropical, for the entire modern system of relations of Europeans with non-Europeans—relations which only through the

Portuguese and the Spaniards seem to be able to develop into relations not only reciprocal but also of amply cultural and freely biological interpenetration, free from the Anglo-Saxon dread of "mongrelization."

Earlier Freyre revealed the root of this perspective, which would become part of the classic sociology of the plantation (1946, 279):

The truth is that the social conditions surrounding the development of the child on the old sugar plantation of Brazil as on the antebellum plantation of Virginia and the Carolinas—where the young one is constantly surrounded by the Negro or mulatto girl who is easily to be had—are in themselves sufficient to explain the predilection [for black women] mentioned.

Hence, the Afro-Brazilian woman is not even seen as an agent of transculturation and the subsequent creation of national culture. Yet, as the principal person who transmitted culture, language, and customs in the plantation system, the slave woman had a vital role. Thus, Freyre further degrades Afro-Brazilian women by postulating their roles as perennial sex objects. It is now possible to understand the sociohistorical frame of reference for the popular Brazilian parable that a Brazilian man's idea of heaven is "a black woman to work, a white woman to marry, and a brown-skinned woman to screw."¹⁰

In his vital exposé of Brazilian racism, Nascimento (1977) declares that the "myth of the innate tendency of the Portuguese to interbreed with the Black woman can be exposed on an examination of Portuguese behavior in Africa." French sociologist Roger Bastide (1972) also criticized the Luso-tropicologist's approach.

No culture responds differently to slavery. All slavery [in this hemisphere] resulted in the domination and exploitation by the white man . . . lusotropicalism changes from a cultural, nonsociological description of events into a sentimental ideology of underdevelopment by ascribing value to the vestiges of a past era [slavery].

The significant critiques of this popular historiographical perspective have largely been made by men, because many Brazilian feminists are fragmented by the same problems that U.S. women's rights activists frequently have—the failure to acknowledge their own racial and class bias in looking at women's issues.

Hence, the problem of social and economic class in the very interpretation of class issues is at once relevant in this discussion, for it demonstrates another problem: Which Third World women speak for which Third World women? This question has relevance for the U.S. as well. One writer who has posed the questions of race, class, and gender together

is Angela Davis. Yet, her pioneering work is sometimes treated narrowly by elite feminist writers in the United States (i.e., Willis 1982).

Conflict in interpretation about class versus national struggle has often been a source of debate in the African American community, especially pertaining to the position of women and the interpretation of events in Africa. As Urdang (1989) has pointed out, the national liberation struggle in Mozambique was the primary structure within which women's equality became possible. Yet, on one occasion immediately following independence in Mozambique in 1975, a member of FRELIMO spoke in the Afro-American community of Harlem. During the question-and-answer period, a young man asked, "What is the role of the woman in the national liberation struggle?" The answer was cogent: "If you have to ask the question, you are not in a liberation struggle."

Isabel Letelier went further in her keynote address at the "Common Differences" conference. She stated that the role a woman plays on the barricades will determine what she will be building (and the role she will play when the fighting has stopped). This was one of the points made by Rigoberta Menchú, a delegate of the exiled Unified Guatemalan Opposition to the United Nations in 1982, and a Quiché Indian woman. As she affirmed in a WBAI radio interview in New York City on December 6, 1982, women not only participate at all levels in the struggle, but they and their children are often labeled "communist terrorists" by the Guatemalan government, which so perceives the illiterate and poor majority in that country. In increasing numbers, women and their children are the actual casualties when the Guatemalan armed forces destroy villages. This is replicated in other situations where actual fighting takes place.

For Menchú, the struggle in Guatemala is merely a continuation of a 450-year-long battle against domination in Guatemala. To the Guatemalan people, the multinational corporation is the inheritor of the original invading armies from Spain. Hence, for Guatemalan women, the concept of "sisterhood" is not the appropriate frame of reference, if it means ignoring class and ethnic barriers (Latin American and Caribbean Women's Collective 1980). In this connection, Burkett (1977) made the following comment while critiquing the vacuum in research which examines the relationship between Marxism and women's studies:

And so we are left with the infrequently examined but blithely accepted assumption that sex is as important a force in the historical process as class . . . and while we theorize endlessly about the oppression of women, we all too frequently forget that the position of the one is maintained only through the exploitation of the other and that such a relationship leaves little concrete room for sisterhood.

Burkett concludes that Indian and/or black women ask themselves: "If sexism was the cause of the discrimination against [me], why [do my]

Indian and black brothers live so poorly?" The separation of sexism from the political, economic, and racial is a strategy of elites. As such, it becomes a tool to confuse the real issues around which most of the world's women struggle. It is not enough to romanticize about the Guatemalan Indians' concept of Mother Earth and how that affects the way they view the world. Equally important is to realize that the Indian peoples in that country are being exterminated in this twentieth-century version of the "Indian Wars." Part of that realization is comprehending that the U.S. government gives military aid money to the Guatemalan regime.

As can be seen by some of the aforementioned examples, sex is often an instrument of oppression. Thus, sexual liberation *can* be a component of national liberation. But the liberation of women, and therefore the process of equality, is fundamentally tied to socioeconomic change. This lesson was elucidated by women from the People's Republic of Cabo Verde immediately after the triumph of PAIGC (the ruling party) in 1976. There is nothing more engaging than the newly developed attitude of a people's confidence to improve their lot and humanize their society through increasing control over their labor and resources. Such was the environment in 1976 when I was invited to the mountain town of Santa Catarina by a group of women on the island of Santiago. The purpose was for me to talk to their daughters in order to convince them to go on studying so that they would be better able to take part in the revolutionary process. There was no electricity in this part of Cabo Verde except between 7 and 11 p.m. because 1976 was a year of desperate power shortage in West Africa and even parts of Europe. As we sat in the candlelight, the determination of the woman who had called the meeting emphasized a certain intensity of the occasion. She affirmed that she had always believed that women were equal to men, and insisted that her focus on sexuality was germane to many women whose husbands live and work far away or in other countries.

I want my daughter to take part in what is taking place in this country. If she gets married now, she will never participate in the change. I don't want her to be like me. I am married to a good man. As you know, about 40 percent of Cape Verdian men are laborers in Europe, and my husband is in Holland. That house over there that we are building brick by brick right next to this little cabin is being made with the money he sends home. Every two years he gets one month's vacation, and comes home to meet the baby he made the last time, and to make a new one. I don't want that for my daughter. I've heard that it is possible to prevent pregnancy by knowing the calendar. Please teach our girls how to count the days so that they can control their pregnancies."

This issue was not about men's oppression of women, but about the impact of unequal and international labor structures on family relations.

Therefore, this analysis of sexuality as it relates to national liberation is different from the questions that U.S. women are accustomed to formulating, i.e., in this context sexuality is understood within the context of economics and politics, rather than simply male domination.

What are the implications of this discussion for U.S. women who also fight inequality? For one thing, women in this country have to struggle on the basis of *issues* rather than gender, ethnicity, or sexual preference. There are basic questions that can be raised which would enable women to develop informed theoretical positions about the relationship between the domestic and international context of class. If that battle is concerning who will control the access and distribution of the world's resources, then on what side does one fall? What is the relationship between societal rewards and punishments? Who is filling the prisons? In any given national liberation struggle, the latter question is the key to determining how one defines those who are the privileged in a society. In the current international economic order, U.S. citizens are privileged. As a result, U.S. women must ask themselves, "How does the way of life in the U.S. affect the way people look at women's equality and national liberation?" Are U.S. women agents for the very victimization against which they struggle? This is especially critical for those women who are members of oppressed minorities in the United States. During the "Common Differences" conference, a Mexican-American lesbian writer declared, "the only hunger that I have ever known is the hunger for sex and for freedom." In the "geopolitics of hunger"—to cite de Castro's book (1977)—that is the privileged situation of a select few. Indeed, freedom is a class concept, defined directly by one's access to resources. U.S. women must boldly abandon the paradigm—the constraining lens—of anticommunism if a mutual comprehensibility between us and other women throughout the world is an objective. The underside of anticommunism is the corollary that life as it is lived by the U.S. capitalist class represents the zenith in human existence.

In addition, U.S. women—regardless of race and irrespective of sexual preference—must reaffirm our collective struggle and move beyond the individualism projected by the wealthy of the world. We must confront the domination of other peoples that is often carried out in our name. Hence, U.S. women must be clear that merely proclaiming that one is a woman, or a lesbian, or a member of a particular ethnic or national group is not enough. Otherwise, it facilitates our becoming pawns in the moves by big business to dominate the women's movement.

It is not in the interests of big business for the women of this country to identify with the overwhelming majority of the world's women and to learn from them. The revolutionary potential of that convergence of forces is checked by concentrating on the sexual and the individual in

framing research. But as Nawal el Saadawi put it, it is impossible to liberate women in countries that are economically dependent on the West.¹² Her position was somewhat in opposition to that of Rosario Morales (1981, 92), who defined as a "macho line" the perspective that the struggle against imperialism comes first.

Frequently, though, the attempts by some U.S. women to link "women's issues" to geopolitics are transformed into sexualism. Such is the case with Robin Morgan's treatise entitled *The Demon Lover: On the Sexuality of Terrorism* (1989). Although Morgan clearly grounds her argument in a critique of warmongering throughout the world, she omits an analysis that would take into account the *systemic* or structural properties of the domination of women and men. By masculinizing war and struggles for liberation, she not only excludes women from them but also delegitimizes those battles. Moreover, she absolves women from any responsibility in the reproduction of values that reinforce a culture of violence. For example, by isolating the problem of wifebeating and the abuse of children (especially females) around the globe, she ends up supporting the position that the Reagan administration took at the Nairobi Women's Meeting. The Administration's effort at that meeting was to concentrate on violence in the family and to discourage analyses that linked geopolitical power and family violence.

Morgan also implies that the "terrorist" is primarily male, though the U.S. military application of that word within the context of low-intensity conflict—from Vietnam to Nicaragua—has definitely included women and children. For Morgan, a terrorist is "the logical incarnation of patriarchal politics in a technological world" (1989, 33). Thus, Morgan defines womanhood as almost supranational and above culture, and hence produces an analysis that is simultaneously separatist and relativist. In calling for a "third politics altogether" removed from the facile positioning between Left and Right (327–28), Morgan avoids the inevitable necessity of acknowledging the responsibility that contemporary capitalism has for the miserable lives of so many women in the world. She claims, "The powers of female sexuality, in all of their expressions and redefinitions (maternal, celibate, bisexual, lesbian, and heterosexual) have the potential of forming completely different relationships in the twenty-first century" (327). Under the same system of profits before people?

The issue is redefining the nation away from a war—positive/peace-negative, bully state. Central to such transformation is the "restructuring of this country's economy so that we do not live off the lives and work of Third World women," as lesbian writer Minnie Bruce Pratt (1984, 54–55) affirmed. It is relatively easy for women in the U.S. to say that "machismo" dominates warlike foreign policy in the country. However, Margaret

Thatcher exists, if for no other reason than to prove that women leaders can also promote militaristic, proapartheid, and antilabor policies.

To many women in national liberation struggles, machismo and feminism are two sides of the same coin, because U.S. feminists have not integrated the political and economic aspects in their analysis of women's issues. Therefore, international feminism within the context of control by U.S. women—elites or nonelites—cannot, should not, exist.¹² U.S. women must boldly define a unifying perspective that integrates race, gender, and class. In addition, the impact of transnational banks and multinational corporations on most human beings must be confronted. After all, when corporations decide to transfer the U.S. jobs overseas, they invariably do so in order to avoid paying U.S. citizens decent wages. This affects the U.S. working class, and ties women in this country to women in the Third World. It also connects women to those men who struggle for equality, as well. To make a real contribution, women must work toward a more whole world for all humans. To quote African revolutionary Amílcar Cabral (1975), "We must build a society on a scientific basis; we can no longer afford to believe in imaginary things."

NOTES

This essay was originally written as a presentation for the conference "Common Differences: Third World Women and Feminist Perspectives" held at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, April 9–13, 1983. One of the stated goals for this controversial and historic meeting was to establish the basis for an "international feminism" prior to the 1985 World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women meeting to be held in Nairobi in 1985. I was concerned that under this rubric, the Nairobi meeting could be appropriated by parochial U.S. feminists. I feared that isolation from a global perspective might enable them to advance the Reagan administration's goals of separating the decade's themes of PEACE, DEVELOPMENT, AND EQUALITY from "women's issues" at that epic gathering in Africa. It is thus to U.S. feminists, and in the context of the above, that this essay was originally written. However, other data, including those provided as a result of attendance at the 1985 meeting in Nairobi, and as a consequence of participation in a 1988 fact-finding trip to the West Bank and Gaza, have been added to ensure the cogency of my original arguments.

1. Subsequent to my making this point during the original presentation at the "Common Differences" conference, others have also provided clarity about the limitations of the "equal access" paradigm. One brilliant example of such an analysis is the one published by Dietz (1987) in which she linked this formulation to a "rights-based" definition of citizenship.

2. Acknowledgment must be made of the critique of and commentary on this paper by sister-colleagues Debbie D'Amico-Samuels, Renee Llanusa-Cestero,

and Ethel Tobach. I am also indebted to Steve Kirkpatrick, librarian of the State University of New York, College at Old Westbury, for research support. Above all, I take this opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to my sister and role model, Rose Catchings, under whose auspices at the World Division of the United Methodist church in New York I attended the United Nations End of the Decade for Women Meeting in Nairobi in 1985. Moreover, it was as a result of funding from her office that I traveled to the South Pacific and specifically to New Caledonia. Her moral and financial support to African American and Third World women throughout the world are herein gratefully acknowledged.

3. Ethel Tobach made this comment in her statements as cochair of a session entitled "Human Values and Scientific Literacy: Leacock's Multidisciplinary Approach" during the January 14–19, 1989, annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Together with Betty Rosoff, Tobach is series editor for *Genes and Gender: A Series on Hereditarianism and Women*.

4. The best report on this chemical warfare is by Wolf (1988), according to whom on May 6, 1988, the "California-based Trans-Technology Corporation through its Federal Laboratories subsidiary in Saltzburg, Pennsylvania—decided to suspend sales of [this weapon] to Israel."

I was the only woman participant to testify on this question before the Congressional Black Caucus Special Hearing on the Middle East on April 26, 1988 (shown on C-Span). The information presented in this chapter comprises components of that testimony.

5. These figures were approximations that I received from independence forces (Parti du Liberation des Kanaks—PALIKA) in the capital city of Noumea in 1978.

6. This problem was the subject of a Bolivian film entitled *Blood of the Condor*, which was directed by Jorge Sanjines in conjunction with the Ukamau Collective—a group of primarily indigenous Bolivians committed to disseminating Bolivian reality. This film was financed publicly by students, workers, and average Bolivians who wanted the truth to be told about the forced sterilizations of indigenous women, as well as U.S. complicity in this problem. It is distributed by New Yorker Films, 16 West 61st Street, New York City.

7. Information given here is detailed in a report entitled "Documents on Colonialist Export from South Africa to Latin America" (June 1977). It was compiled by the Africa Research Group, Uppsala University (Department of Peace and Conflict Research), Uppsala, Sweden. It was distributed by NACLA, which has offices in New York City.

8. Both of these films are distributed by New Yorker Films, 16 West 61st Street, New York City.

9. Racist sexism in Brazil is reflected in different ways, and has many corollaries. One example of this emerged during an interview that I had with renowned Brazilian archbishop Dom Helder Camara during his trip to New York City to attend the Spiritual Summit Conference VI, October 7–9, 1984, sponsored by the Temple of Understanding. Not only was he startled to see that a black woman had made the appointment to interview him, but in response to a question that alluded to racism in Brazil, he took great offense at the suggestion and denied that such could be possible, affirming—oblivious to the reaction his words caused—that there could be no racism in Brazil "because the entire country drank milk from the breasts of the black mammy [mae preta]."

10. The Portuguese version of this rhyme is as follows: "Preta p'ra trabalhar, branca p'ra casar, e mulata p'ra fornicar."

11. I reconstructed this commentary, which was originally in Crioulo and Portuguese.

12. This statement was made during a conference sponsored by the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Council (ADC) on June 22, 1982, in New York City, and was reinforced during an interview with me (see references).

13. The hierarchization of issues was a complex one at the July 1985 End of the Decade for Women Meeting in Nairobi. For one thing, it was the first such meeting of its kind on the African continent. Many of the women from Latin America were concerned about the foreign debt; many Arab women were concerned about Palestinian national rights; African women were united in their stand against apartheid. That historic conference was divided into two segments—the nongovernmental (NGO) forum and the official, governmental component. For the U.S.-based Women for Racial and Economic Equality (WREE), who participated in the forum, it was gratifying to have our petition opposing Reagan administration policies signed by 1,300 out of 2,000 U.S. sisters. Above all, the majority of U.S. women who went to Nairobi rejected the Reagan administration's position (as articulated by U.S. State Department liaison Jean Berghaust in a pre-Nairobi NGO meeting at the UN) that "peace and disarmament are not women's issues."

That the U.S. government saw itself in an adversarial position to the concerns of the world's women is exemplified by the fact that the only man in the official delegation was Alan Keyes, an African American diplomat who fluently articulated U.S. government positions on South Africa. Although Maureen Reagan was the titular head of the delegation, it was perceived by many observers from around the world that the decisions were being made by Keyes. When I confronted him during a press conference as to which group of U.S. women he represented, he replied that such was beyond his purview; he was there to teach the other members of the official delegation how to "handle the UN system."

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SEXUALITY AND SEXUAL POLITICS

Conflicts and Contradictions for
Contemporary Women in the
Middle East

Evelyn Accad

Sexuality seems to have a revolutionary potential so strong that many political women and men are afraid of it. They prefer, therefore, to dismiss its importance by arguing that it is not as central as other factors, such as economic and political determinations which are easily recognizable as the major factors that produce revolution—class inequalities, hunger, poverty, lack of job opportunities. In this essay, I would like to argue that sexuality is much more central to social and political problems in the Middle East than previously thought, and that unless a sexual revolution is incorporated into political revolution, there will be no real transformation of social relations.

By sexual revolution, I mean one which starts at the level of personal life, with a transformation of attitudes toward one's mate, family, sexuality, and society; specifically, a transformation of the traditional rapports of domination and subordination which permeate interpersonal, particularly sexual, relationships (such as power struggles, jealousy, possession). Change is fundamental at the level of sexual and familial intimacy. We need to develop an exchange of love, tenderness, equal sharing, and recognition among people. This would create a more secure and solid basis for change in other spheres of life—political, economic, social, re-



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